



The Oldest Thirst in the World

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West Africa

There are regions where the silence of water weighs heavier than thirst. Where dust has become a second skin, and the horizon offers nothing but an incandescent sky. West Africa, a vast mosaic of ancient cultures, has learned to live with absence: the absence of water, of time, of the world's gaze.

Here, rain is celebrated like a birth, and water is more than a resource: it is spirit, it is witness, it is an open wound. From the Sahel to the Gulf of Guinea, entire peoples have woven resilience from empty clay pots, from dances that invoke, from rudimentary technologies, and a faith that never dries. For if this land knows anything, it is how to speak to the sky.

But the sky no longer answers with its former generosity. Climate change has unraveled sacred rhythms. The ancient water routes — rivers like the Niger and the Volta — are narrowing, poisoned, vanishing. And humanity, in its unconscious march, has turned its back on the thirstiest and wisest.

Today, however, the story can shift. Aurora Azul — already touching the eastern edges of the continent — may extend an artery to the west. The great southern water circuit, born from Antarctic meltwaters, could cross the continent underground, raising the forgotten lifeblood of West Africa. Let water return as justice. Let it remember what the world tried to forget.

Drought and Debt: Anatomy of a Forgotten Land

West Africa has not simply been struck by drought — it has been dismantled by it. From the shrinking of Lake Chad — which in just a few decades has lost over 90% of its surface — to the shifting sands of the Sahel, water has retreated as if ashamed. But from whom does water hide? What is it running from?

This region, home to millions of souls, has been plundered not only in its minerals, its people, its history, but also in its simplest right: the right to drink, to sow, to bathe in one's own childhood. Countries like Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, and Senegal watch as their aquifers run dry without ever truly having been theirs. Hydraulic projects arrive like promises in a foreign tongue — conditional, fragile, and almost always too late.

Water has been held captive by debt. Controlled by external forces, it has flowed toward extractivism, toward export, toward industries that do not nourish but deplete. And in the midst of this historical drainage, people have dug wells with their hands, followed cracks in the earth like maps, walked for days just to fill a bucket. Women, especially, have carried the future on their backs, in faded plastic containers.

But all is not lost.

A continental water artery — fed by Antarctic melt and guided by local wisdom — can bring redemption where it is most needed. Through systems of underground channels, aquifers connected by heat-resistant flexible tubing, and solar-powered water regeneration stations, West Africa can reclaim what history has stolen.

This is not only about bringing water.

It is about restoring dignity.

About reconciling the sky with this land.

The Memory of Water in West Africa

Water has not forgotten.

In the cracks of ancient baobabs, in the songs of Fulani women kneading millet, in the griot tales passed on under the *néré* tree's shade, water still speaks. Still sings. West Africa has not only known thirst: it has known how to name it, invoke it, remember it.

For the Dogon people of Mali, water was a direct link to the cosmos. The star Sirius, whose movements they studied with ancestral precision, governed the rain cycles. In the dry plazas of the Mossi lands in Burkina Faso, invocation dances were held for the water spirits — subtle beings inhabiting stones, puddles, rivers. In the Niger Delta, the Bozo people saw the river as a living ancestor, branching not only in waterways but in ethical choices.

But when dams arrived, when imposed canals and monocultures took root, something broke. The Niger River was dammed without listening to the words that named it, without understanding the pacts that united its waters with the seasons, the fish, the memories. Engineering silenced poetry. Solutions came, but they did not heal: they drained, segmented, calculated — and in doing so, they forgot.

Today, however, the voice of water returns.

Young griots rewrite old songs with electronic drums; farmers combine ancestral knowledge with moisture sensors; communities replant mangroves along Senegal's coasts, guided by grandmothers who know the true names of the sea.

Water can return to West Africa not only as a liquid, but as a restored story. And in that return, ancient knowledge will not be exotic decoration, but compass. In the cracks of a cracked land, the memory of water still breathes. It only needs to be heard.

Technologies with Soul: Water Solutions for West Africa

In West Africa, the future is not built by denying the ancestral, but by translating it. If water has been history, myth, and sustenance, its return cannot be merely a technical act: it must also be an act of reconciliation. Water solutions here are designed to speak the language of the land, to flow with rhythms already present.

The first strategy involves harvesting seasonal rains — intense yet brief — that now flood and then vanish. In Sahelian villages, where rain falls like fleeting drumbeats, networks of catchment terraces made of stone and clay are being created, shaped by traditional textile patterns. Far from damaging the landscape, these systems re-stitch it.

Alongside this, the proposal includes the installation of underground reservoirs in stabilized dune areas, built with low-cost, biocompatible materials, allowing for the storage of meltwater channeled from Antarctica through the global AQUA HELIX system. This water would arrive via flexible conduits, buried and protected from extreme heat, following preexisting logistical corridors — such as underused colonial-era routes.

In the river zones of the Niger and Volta, biological oxygenation and purification stations are proposed to regenerate polluted waters without chemicals, using symbiotic bacteria and filtering plants — water hyacinths, papyrus, moringa — integrated into floating platforms that also provide shade and reduce evaporation. All systems would be modular and co-designed by local artisans and hydraulic engineers.

Lastly, the use of atmospheric condensation towers is proposed — inspired by ancient Saharan fog-catchers and Hausa mud cisterns. Strategically placed in the driest areas, these towers act like artificial trees: collecting water from the air and distributing it to nearby villages using solar power.

Each of these technologies is not foreign to the land: they merge modern science with deep roots. In this symbiosis, West Africa not only adapts to climate change — it confronts it with dignity, poetry, and precision.

Weaving Water: Water Governance and Alliances from West Africa

Water is not imposed; it is shared.

And in West Africa, where knowledge is transmitted through songs, proverbs, and ancient silences, water governance cannot be reduced to laws or committees: it must be a living network of respect, memory, and collective decision-making. This chapter maps out possible alliances — fluid pathways among communities, nature, and the future.

At the heart of this governance is the wisdom of elder councils and women water-keepers — traditional figures who have long safeguarded the fair distribution of wells, springs, and streams. Their experience is now integrated into local decision-making

platforms, where community knowledge coexists with satellite data, digital maps, and oral histories. Technology does not replace the council; it amplifies it.

The region proposes forming a West African Water Network — a collaborative mesh of peoples, rivers, and deserts — that not only receives water from the AQUA HELIX system but distributes it based on community priorities. This network anchors itself in autonomous regional nodes that collectively decide how to use the resource — for agriculture, ecological regeneration, human consumption, and ritual.

One of its pillars is the climate co-responsibility model, whereby communities receiving meltwater commit to conserving local biodiversity, reforesting watersheds, and monitoring water quality transparently. In return, they receive technical support, ethical financing, and a voice in the global decisions of the system.

Ties with South America — particularly with Afro-descendant communities in the Chocó, the Amazon, and the Caribbean — are essential to this network. Afro-diasporic water alliances are being woven, where historic struggles for land and autonomy translate into concrete proposals: from shared technologies to cultural exchanges, from drought-resistant seeds to shared stories under the moon.

Finally, West Africa proposes that water never again be a commodity, but a bond. And in this network of mutual care — where every drop tastes of history — not only the soil's moisture is restored, but the dignity of a region that has been plundered for centuries and now sings, with strength, the poem of the future.

The Water Drum

(Oral tale of free transmission, inspired by Mandé and Akan traditions)

In a time without clocks, when clouds spoke to trees and the baobabs were still young, the peoples of West Africa lived to the rhythm of water. Each village had a drum, and that drum was its heart: not only did it call for gatherings or dance, but it also marked the rains and reminded them when to share the well.

But a dry season came. So long and fierce that the drums fell silent. Water turned to mist, and the springs to cracks. The elders consulted the sky, the griots sang to the ancestors, and the children, with open palms, asked the earth to speak again.

One day, a traveler arrived, his face covered in dust and eyes shining like newborn wells. He brought no gold or salt, but a sealed vessel. He said he came from the southern ice, where water sleeps under the moon. He didn't speak much, but he asked for the oldest drum to be played.

When they struck the hide, the vessel opened. It did not pour water, but wind. And that wind traveled across the villages, touched the dry treetops and descended through the cracks. Wherever it passed, the air turned cool, and the women felt that their calabashes were no longer empty.

Then they understood: the drum was not to call water, but to remember it. And the vessel carried not liquid, but memory. For water comes when the earth remembers how to care for it.

Since that day, every year, at the beginning of the dust season, the peoples of the west play the drum. And even if it doesn't always rain, they always sing. Because there are droughts worse than those of the sky: those of the soul that forgets what it must protect.

I am the water that dances in the drum

I am water,
and though my feet leave no prints in the sand,
my step awakens sleeping roots.
Do not look at me as a broken river,
but as the memory that still sings.
I was rain on your grandparents' brows,
ran around the ankles of children,
and danced in the millet pot
like a grateful spirit.
Today I hide.
Not because I don't want to come,
but because the paths have forgotten me.
The rivers have been cut with machetes of greed,
the mangroves uprooted as if they were mistakes.
But I am not resentment.
I am the drum that has never stopped beating,

the echo of a shared calabash,
the breath of the shea tree,
the song of the woman who washes by the shore
and prays, unknowingly, for all humanity.

Call me.

Not with dams or data,
but with respect.

Strike the drum of the soul,
and I will return, not as punishment,
but as hope.

For where there is a thirsty child
and an elder who remembers my name,
there I will be,
silent and powerful,
I am the water that dances in the drum.

Epilogue: The Age of Living Water

In every word written, in every image evoked, in every story told along this vast planetary journey, water has been more than a resource: it has been spirit, bridge, memory, and promise. We have walked beside invisible rivers and forgotten lakes, we have rescued voices buried in sacred caves and gazed upon trembling glaciers. From Antarctic snows to Mayan caverns, from Oceanian islands to African deltas, the message is one: humanity has forgotten how to listen to water.

This project—woven with words, science, art, and history—is not merely a technical proposal, nor a sum of isolated ideas. It is an invocation of consciousness, a collective call to restore the sacred bond between peoples and the vital cycle that sustains them. It is the possibility of a new planetary ethic, based on reciprocity, dignity, and regeneration.

The age of living water is the one in which water systems are not property or merchandise, but open veins of shared life. It is the time when decisions are not made

in high towers of power, but through careful listening to the land, to its wounds and its dreams.

The journey doesn't end here. Another begins: the journey of real commitment. To plant infrastructure that heals rather than harms. To educate for environmental tenderness. To design policies that protect beyond borders. To build beauty where there was ruin. Because we still have time.

If water has spoken, if it has told us its stories and shown us its soul, then let us now be worthy of its trust.

For when water finds respect, life becomes possible.

And when humanity learns to care, hope becomes inevitable.

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